

As Congress is wrapping up its Winter District Work Period, I've spent a great deal of time attending events and visiting with folks around the First District. I was pleased to visit with Advanced Placement Government students at Fredericksburg Academy and 5th Graders at Cople Elementary in Hague. I was also supposed to meet with Ni River Middle School's 7th graders, but this morning's snow had other plans for the students.

As the husband of a lifelong educator, I know the tremendous value and importance our teachers carry with them to students every school day. To that end, I'm working in Washington to lend both our students and their teachers a helping hand.

First, in this time of tighter budgets and looming shortfalls, we need to look for nontraditional solutions to expand and improve education opportunities. Just this week it was announced that a \$250 million public-private partnership would be doubled to \$500 million, in an effort to prepare more than 10,000 new math and science schoolteachers over the next five years. This program would also provide on-the-job training for an additional 100,000 teachers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

This funding is a direct result of contributions from high-tech businesses, universities, and foundations and is in addition to the funds that federal agencies provide to the STEM fields. These types of partnerships are the stopgap we need to find solutions which both ease budget concerns, while providing top-notch education for our students.

I know that budgets aren't something that just school boards are concerned about, but teachers as well. I've cosponsored H.R. 2329 the Teacher Tax Credit, which extends tax deductions for school supplies purchased by elementary and secondary school teachers. I know teachers are the ones who pick up the slack when classroom budgets fall short, and we've got to ensure teachers know we're behind them.

Additionally, to bring in more folks to the education profession, I've cosponsored H.R. 1313, the Troops to Teachers Improvement Act. This legislation expands programs to provide veterans with help to earn their teacher certification in exchange for three years of service in high need school systems or public charter schools. This is a win for not only our returning service men and women, but for schools with classrooms that are filled to capacity.

Much still needs to be done as we work towards improving our Nation's education system. In the meantime I'd like to recognize and congratulate the 25 newly National Board Certified Teachers in Virginia's First District, who passed their certification this December. Their continued efforts to achieve the highest education standards and teaching methods are to be commended.

Congressman Rob Wittman represents the First District of Virginia. He was elected to his first full term in November 2008 and serves on the Natural Resources Committee and the Armed Services Committee where he is the Ranking Member of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.